

**Statement of Patrice (Patti) Aaron to the House Commerce Committee, the Hon. Frank Foster, Chair.**

**December 3, 2014**

My name is Patti Aaron and I am a lifelong Michigan resident. My father, who grew up a child of the Depression, began what is now a very successful business called Production Tool Supply, an industrial tool supply company with locations in Roseville, Novi, Warren, Grand Rapids, Jackson, Lansing and Madison Heights.

Because of his success, my family and I have had the opportunity to provide philanthropic support to well-deserving organizations across the state. I have prioritized supporting non-profits whose core mission values tolerance and inclusivity and whose programming creates opportunities for those who have historically had limited access to quality educational opportunities. For example, I provide support to a program at the University of Michigan that helps economically disadvantaged students receive the academic and holistic support needed to succeed. I support Detroit Food Academy, an afterschool program for teens in Detroit schools to learn about the food business and think strategically about marketing and sales. I support Art Road Nonprofit which brings art programming to Detroit elementary schools whose budgets no longer allow for art classes. I support the American Jewish World Service which is working to help women and girls and the LGBT community in countries outside of the United States.

I believe the opportunity to learn and work in a diverse environment builds awareness and understanding about self and others, which in turn strengthens community as a whole and cultural progress in particular. I believe in the extraordinary creative and productive power of compassionate community - built on the tenants of inclusivity and mutual respect.

For these reasons, I strongly support modernizing the state's human rights law to include sexual orientation and gender identity. We have a responsibility to diminish the feeling of those in the LGBT community who live in fear and hiding. As a Jew I am deeply attuned to the plight of those who feel like they are 'strangers in a strange land' and take seriously that we have a responsibility to make all feel welcome. Michigan is an outlier among other states by not expanding our laws to provide legal protection to the LGBT community.

I came out as gay in my 40s and was able to do so without fear of retribution because I had a very accepting family and social structure. I am well aware that this is not true for so many others. Many of my close friends have shared with me their fears that they will be fired because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. My eldest daughter has now left for California which she views as a more welcoming environment. My 24 year old daughter lives in Detroit and is quite frustrated with what she perceives as intolerance among many of those in leadership positions in our State.

I urge you to move now to amend the Elliott Larsen Civil Rights Act to include sexual orientation and gender identity.